

# The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer

## Study Guide

Characters: Describe and include social class.

The Narrator—

The Knight—

The Squire—

The Yeoman—

The Prioress—

The Monk—

The Friar—

The Nun—

The Priest—

The Merchant—

The Cleric—

The Man of Law—

The Franklin—

The Haberdasher—

The Carpenter—

The Weaver—

The Dyer—

The Tapestry—

The Cook—

The Shipman—

The Physician—

The Wife of Bath—

The Parson—

The Plowman—

The Miller—

The Manciple—

The Reeve—

The Summoner—

The Pardoner—

The Host—

The Canon—

The Canon's Yeoman—

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ENGLISH LITERATURE

"Prologue" to Canterbury Tales

Define IRONY -

2. Define SATIRE -

3. Explain PHYSIOGNOMY -

THE KNIGHT - NO IRONY

1. In general, what were the battles called that the Knight fought for the church?
2. Describe his clothing: Why didn't this particular character return home to clean up and change clothes before going on the pilgrimage?

THE SQUIRE -

1. The Squire was very fashionable. Describe his clothing and explain why he would wear such "eye-catching" apparel.
2. How many battles had the Squire fought as compared to his father?
3. In what other "knightly pursuits" did the Squire excel?
4. For what reasons would the Squire want to become a knight? Was he as sincere as his father?

THE YEOMAN -

1. What is a yeoman? To whom was he a servant on this trip?
2. Describe his apparel and gear.
3. What details tell the reader that this pilgrim was extremely precise?

THE PRIORESS -

1. What exactly is a prioress? (Use a dictionary.) Realize that she was not permitted to leave her convent for pilgrimages or to own pets.
2. Give examples from the list below of ways that the Prioress tried to look better than everybody else:
  - a. singing -
  - b. speech -
  - c. eating -
  - d. dress -
3. Do you think it was proper for a nun "to imitate courtly ways"? Why?
4. Why would Chaucer add the detail about the dogs and what she fed them?
5. The A on the Prioress' brooch was significant because it may either have stood for "amor" (earthly love of opposite sex) or "agape" (love of God). Why does Chaucer add this detail?

THE MONK -

1. Define the word "monk" using a dictionary. Please note that a monk takes three vows: poverty, obedience, and celibacy.
  - a. How did the Monk break the obedience rules of St. Benedict and Augustine?
  - b. Give four examples of how he broke the vows of poverty.
2. What reason does Chaucer the Pilgrim use to excuse this pilgrim's blatant disregard for his vows?

THE FRIAR -

1. From your reading, what is the job of a friar? What does he receive for his work and where should it go? . .
2. Why would Chaucer write about the Friar's gallantry and wooing, and in the next sentence mention that the Friar pays for their marriages?
3. If the Friar was "an easy man for absolution," what would make forgiveness very attainable, no matter what the sin?
4. Who did the Friar know "better than beggars and lepers"? Why should he really see to their needs? Why wouldn't he?
5. Define "widow's mite " and its significance to this character.
6. Arbitration days were officially forbidden for friars to attend. Why did this pilgrim go anyway?
7. Describe his fashionable apparel.

THE MERCHANT -

1. Define "figured." What does this detail show about the Merchant?
2. List at least two other details about the Merchant's appearance that would lead a reader to believe that he was successful.
3. What irony does Chaucer include about the Merchant's finances?

THE STUDENT -

1. Describe the appearance of the Student and his horse.
2. Define "cleric." Was the Student a commoner or member of the clergy? (In order to become a student, he would have to signify his intention of becoming a cleric, but he was not bound to proceed to a position of responsibility in the church.)
3. Why wouldn't the Student work for money?
4. What did he prefer to food and fine clothing?
5. How did he repay his friends that he "touched up" for money?
6. What does this pilgrim do with his knowledge?

THE LAWYER -

1. List two titles the Lawyer held to show that he was respected. For whom did he work?
2. What does this pilgrim use his skill to acquire "fee simple"? Is this ethical?
3. What does Chaucer mean when he states the Lawyer was "deserving to be held in awe, or so he seemed," and "yet he seemed much busier than he was"?

THE FRANKLIN -

1. Describe this pilgrim's appearance. According to physiognomy, who does he look like?
2. Define "franklin."
3. What did the Franklin have "on display" for everyone to show that he was generous?
4. Because the Franklin was well-liked, list three positions he had been elected to. Do you think he earned or bought his popularity?

THE GUILDSMEN -

1. Name the five guilds represented by Chaucer. Define the last one. (See glossary)
2. Define "guild." Give the detailed definition.
3. Chaucer hints that these men are successful. What material objects and praises support this?
4. What ironic touch about the men's success and their wives does Chaucer add to detract from their description?

THE COOK -

1. This cook could distinguish between various London ales blindfolded. At what cooking techniques was he expert?
2. Why was it ironic that creamed chicken (white sauce) was his best dish? Why was this pilgrim going on this trip?

THE SKIPPER -

1. The Skipper was an excellent navigator and a rough sort of fellow. Yet his embarrassment was "he sat his cart horse pretty much at sea." Considering the rolling seas and horseriding, what was his problem?
2. Chaucer writes "he was a true good fellow"; list two reasons why this is a hypocritical statement.

THE PHYSICIAN -

1. List two unusual medical practices the Physician used which were actually common in the Medieval Period.
2. What "game of mutual aid, with each one winning" was the Physician playing with the apothecaries?
3. What pestilence did the Physician take advantage of to get money and gold?

THE WIFE OF BATH -

1. In what hobby does the Wife excel? How does Chaucer use this detail to show that she is not truly Christian in her offerings?
2. Women's legs were never shown in public. Describe the Wife's clothing and what Chaucer was trying to get the reader to understand.
3. How many husbands had the Wife had? Why does Chaucer include "other youthful company- But let that pass for now!"?
4. According to medieval physiognomy, a gap in the front teeth meant the person was envious, irreverent, bold and fond of luxury, or destined to travel a great deal. Does the Wife fit any of these characteristics?
5. According to the humours, what does the Wife's red face mean?

THE PARSON -

1. Define "parson." List three examples of the Parson's good works.
2. How does "practice what you preach" fit this pilgrim?
3. The Parson believes he must set a good example, "for if the gold rusts, what will the iron do?" Explain this metaphor.

THE PLOWMAN - NO IRONY

1. List three details Chaucer gives to show the goodness of this pilgrim.
2. What relation was the Plowman to the Parson?

THE MILLER -

1. Describe the Miller's appearance. According to physiognomy, largeness of physique and nostrils, red hair and warts indicated a person was bold, garrulous, and quarrelsome. Was he?
2. Name two unusual ways this pilgrim opened doors. Why does Chaucer tell you this?
3. How did the Miller cheat people with his "golden thumb"?

THE MANCIPLE -

1. Define "manciple."
2. When this pilgrim purchased food for his lawyers' institution, "he came out more than even with the game." What did Chaucer mean by this line?
3. Chaucer goes into detail about "the whole school of learned men" with which the manciple kept pace. What irony is Chaucer hoping the reader will see?

THE REEVE -

1. Define "reeve."
2. Describe the Reeve. According to medieval physiognomy, a thin body and calfless legs suggested a choleric temper. Does his personality support this description?
3. Who feared the Reeve? Why?
4. The Reeve was "given sole accounting since his lord reached twenty years." Why do you think the Reeve had "private riches"?
5. Where did the Reeve ride in the group? Why?

THE SUMMONER -

1. What was the Summoner's job? Why was this ironic?
2. Describe this pilgrim's frightening appearance and odor. Why does his job coincide with his looks?
3. The "livid white" blotches and "nobs and nubbins" may have been the initial stages of leprosy. Why might the Summoner be going on this pilgrimage?
4. Why did the "young men and girls" fear the Summoner especially?
5. How does the reader know that this pilgrim is intoxicated just by glancing at him?

THE PARDONER -

1. Define "pardoner."
2. The reference to the Blessed Mary's hospital was because pardoners often collected money there, claiming it was for the hospital. Why was the Pardoner's trip to Rome a questionable detail?
3. According to medieval physiognomy, bright blond, long hair signifies sneakiness, while bulging eyes indicates greed. Do these characteristics support this pilgrim's personality?
4. What two relics did the Pardoner tell people the pillowcase was? And the pigs' bones?
5. Chaucer the Pilgrim tries to find something redeeming about the Pardoner. Yet how does the Pardoner use this gift for his own gain?

## *Study Questions*

### *"The General Prologue"*

1. How many pilgrims are making the journey to Canterbury?
2. Why are all these people going to Canterbury?
3. List the members of the middle class in the group.
4. List the members of the clergy.
5. Which members of the clergy appear to be corrupt or sinful?
6. What plan for the group does the Host propose?
7. How does Chaucer himself fit into the group?
8. By what devices does Chaucer reveal his characters?
9. How many of the tales did Chaucer actually complete?
10. What weaknesses within the Church do the pilgrim clergy represent?



"The Pardoner's Tale"

1. What is an allegory?
2. What abstract qualities are portrayed by the evil young men in the story?
3. What is the theme of this tale?
4. What is the moral lesson of this tale?
5. What characteristics does the Pardoner reveal in his prologue?
6. How does this story fit the character of the Pardoner?
7. Why would medieval audiences have been familiar with The Pardoner's Tale?
8. How does the youngest reveler plan to kill the other two?
9. Does he kill them?
10. How does the youngest die?

### Topic Tracking

Provide quotes, situations, and page numbers where the following motifs are presented or discussed.

1. Christianity

2. Deception

3. Spring

4. Reputation

Others:

Themes:

**Define:**

Heroic Couplets –

Irony –

Speech –

Satire –

Physiognomy –

The Black Plague –

The Hundred Years' War –

The Renaissance –

**GENRES – Define and note a tale as an example.**

Romance:

Fabliau:

Myth:

Breton Lais:

Beast Fable:

Sermon:

Exemplum:

Miracle Story:

Allegory:

Mock Romance: